





Bishop's Lodge Woolton Park Woolton Liverpool L25 6DT

February 21 1984

Ivan Patrick,

I very much appreciated the time which the Prime Minister and you gave us on February 1<sup>st</sup> and the way in which both of you were trying to enter into our world of Merseyside. I was particularly struck by Mrs Thatcher's remarks about being unable to meet and listen to young people here, because of demonstrators making a hearing impossible.

We have just completed a week-end in which the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas has been visiting Merseyside. It was a very demanding, sometimes overwhelming visit, as the Commission divided into groups who met a wide range of people. I am serving on the Commission and found it a remarkably fresh experience to visit my own patch!

I wished you both could have been present at the Open Forum we held in Kirkby. We made it known that anyone could come to one of three places, to tell us whatever they felt we should hear. The Kirkby meeting was most impressive: scarcely a word was



wasted. One London member of the Commission said that, if the meeting had been held in Hackney, it would inevitably have ended in shouting and angry resolutions. In Kirkby it was strong but very articulate.

Forgive a long letter, but I really want to attempt to give you the flavour of the evening. And would you consider putting this in the Prime Minister's hands too?

Unemployment fixed the foreground throughout — very long term unemployment. We went back for a further two hours the next morning: we were then told that unemployment hit Kirkby in a big way just when the Labour Government introduced selective Employment Tax in the 1960s. Newly arrived firms started to look sharply at surplus labour, and hundreds of young people became unemployed. Repeatedly the picture came through of a generation which has already grown up with no prospect of work.

"We lived with unemployment for ten years. My husband's pride is at the bottom. He's 42 and on the scrapheap. He's very talented, but he can't use most of his talents, because they cost money. My children are embarrassed, because they've got to ask him for anything. I'm desperate as a wife and mother of five to sustain our family. One child wants to study archaeology, one is thoroughly anti-social."



"Indignity is put on us by the Sun newspaper. Christmas comes and you've got to starve yourself to give your kids a present.... Give us our dignity"

"There's frustration and apathy in our family. My son did a four year apprenticeship: then his firm paid him off. He keeps going after jobs. He got married.. stays in bed in the morning. I chivy him to get up. He says, 'what's the point?' Now he's 21. There's a baby coming."

"We are an industrial wilderness"

"You have to borrow on this week's and next week's social security if anything goes wrong. The fabric of our life is being eroded."

"I have a wife and two children. I receive £48.80 plus £13 Family allowance. That means there's no room for house insurance or personal insurance, Christmas or birthday presents. We're spending £3 a day on gas and electric, because we're in all day. My boys joined the Cubs: the uniform costs £8. My mother and relations help, but my pride is hurt. You find that borrowing spirals?"



"Whole families are unemployed. In a magistrates and I know that often there is no way that a fine can be paid, because all the family is out of work."

"There are no facilities, no dance halls. You can't afford to travel to the Leisure Centre."

The next morning we had a considerable discussion about the problems of funding for voluntary bodies, including Centre 65, the Church Youth Centre where we met. We were told, "We receive donations from the Borough of Knowsley" — £35,000 running costs, £3,500 from the Borough. Capital money can often be found, but not revenue.

One member of our Commission David Booth is Chairman of BICC a large employer nearby. He said that BICC gave a building <sup>to be a Leisure Centre</sup> in Prescott, because they were making people unemployed. "Now the Leisure Centre turns out to be for the employed."

There were two on line predictions of Toxteth-like troubles. There was also a long and disturbing account of police relations in Kirkby, which reflected all too similarly what



57  
we heard about Toxteth. I was in a way more overwhelmed by the sense of powerlessness than by the threat of violence. If powerlessness breeds a sense of hopelessness, then everyone gives up.

When we came to see you, we had quite a discussion about mobility. This week-end, looking at Inner City and Outer City areas in Merseyside with our visitors has made me see again what mobility of the self-confident does to create communities of the left behind. If you could stand in the shoes of people in, for example, Kirkby I think you would feel how devastating it is to see those who could bring leadership and renewed vigour to their own community being passed by the absence of jobs and good housing to move away.

That makes me argue for measures to lean much harder on industry to invest in Merseyside. The Kirkby evening, in which groups from Hayton and Steelmerdale made very similar comments, highlighted for me the need to acknowledge in public policy that



Very high unemployment is not a temporary phenomenon. 1960s school leavers are already 35. I hope we do not have to ~~marish~~ another whole generation to experience this total absence of jobs.

In Kirkby on Friday, people said, "we need reduction of working hours and of the retiring age. Trade Unions have not got to be so greedy for overtime." But also, "Industry no longer wants manpower" (we'd just been told of £17m investment producing jobs for 150). "Man needs to be wanted, but industry won't provide the jobs." "We hope your Commission will dream a little: look at ways of using man's creativity outside industry. This a way in which people can contribute to society and receive a reasonable wage for it."

I said the other day that the Community Programme is a small acknowledgement that unemployment is not a temporary phenomenon. But it is very small. In Hereford we receive something like 6800 places when we have 150000 unemployed. In Hereford we have



7  
as many unemployed young people as in the whole  
of Greater London - which is ten times bigger

Forgive me for writing at such length.

That meeting in Kirkby was very special and I  
feel the responsibility of passing on some of  
the deeply-felt hurt, which came across to us.

I am very conscious of adding to the  
burdens which you bear: I also have a  
strong sense of how difficult it is in  
Westminster and the City of London to  
understand how life is experienced in "the  
North West Triangle" of Belfast, Glasgow and  
Liverpool.

Yours sincerely  
+ Dave Liverpool.